

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

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LONDON FOR PAO ANDERSON AND SEITZ

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, LT, SF

SUBJECT: VOA COOPERATION WITH GOL

REF: A. USIA 1739, B. MASERU 1889,

1. MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING E.M. LEROTHOLI ASKED TO SEE ME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE FOLLOWING MY RETURN HERE JANUARY 25 FROM CONSULTATIONS. (HIS PURPOSE WAS TO LET US KNOW THAT AAI, THROUGH ITS VICE PRESIDENT FERRARI, HAD JUST INVITED HIM TO THE U.S. TO SPEAK, MEET WITH U.S. BUSINESSMEN, ETC. AND THAT PRIME MINISTER JONATHAN HAD APPROVED HIS GOING IN LATE FEBRUARY. BEFORE ACCEPTING HE WANTED TO MAKE CERTAIN THIS WAS AGREEABLE TO THE EMBASSY WHICH LAST YEAR OFFERED HIM AN IV GRANT WHICH HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO ACCEPT. DCM STOKES AND I ASSURED HIM OF OUR AGREEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR THE AAI TOUR WHICH WOULD ALSO ENABLE HIM TO VISIT WEST AFRICA ENROUTE AND WASHINGTON, AT LEAST BRIEFLY).

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2. I TOLD LEROTHOLI THAT CONSULTATIONS HAD PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS GOL REQUEST FOR VOA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN WASHINGTON. BECAUSE OF BBC'S PREDOMINANT ROLE IN DEVELOPING, MAINTAINING AND STRENGTHENING LESOTHO'S TRANSMITTERS AND PROGRAMS, AND IN VIEW OF NEED FOR VOA/BBC COOPERATION WORLDWIDE, WE HAD ALSO FRANKLY DISCUSSED THE SUBJECT WITH BBC OFFICIALS IN LONDON. AS A RESULT, I WAS HAPPY TO SAY A VOA ENGINEER WAS SCHEDULED TO VISIT MASERU

IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO ASSESS GOL SHORTWAVE RECEIVING EQUIPMENT, WHICH U.S. HAD PROVIDED, AND TO GIVE TECHNICAL ADVICE ON RECEIVING VOA FEED FROM MONROVIA. I NOTED THIS WOULD OPEN A NUMBER OF POSSIBILITIES INCLUDING USE OF REPORTS FROM VOA CORRESPONDENTS AS PRESENTLY ARRANGED WITH A LARGE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL RADIO STATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA.

3. LEROTHOLI SAID HE WAS DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR THE "PSOTIVE" RESPONSE WHICH EXCEEDED HIS EXPECTATIONS. HE SAID HE HAD RECENTLY OUTLINED TO PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET A PLAN TO GIVE RADIO LESOTHO A TRUE "NEWS" CAPACITY; AT PRESENT ITS NEWS WAS OFTEN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATE WHICH MEANT IT WAS FRANKLY NOT ABLE TO COMPETE WITH SOUTH AFRICAN RADIO. HE SAID THE CABINET HAD WARMLY ENDORSED THE PLAN TO UPGRADE LESOTHO RADIO AS A PRIORITY MATTER. HE WAS CONFIDENT HIS REQUEST FOR THE RESOURCES TO DO THE JOB WOULD ALSO BE APPROVED.

4. WE THEN DISCUSSED THE STATUS OF THE TWO NEW 100 KW SHORTWAVE TRANSMITTERS WHICH THE UK IS PROVIDING, ONE FOR BBC USE IN BROADCASTING TO EAST AFRICA, THE OTHER FOR LESOTHO'S USE. LEROTHOLI CONFIRMED THAT CONTRACT FOR CONSTRUCTION IS EXPECTED TO BE SIGNED SOON. HE ADDED THAT IN ADDITION TO THE RESIDENT BBC ENGINEER THERE WERE TWO BBC ADVISORS IN LESOTHO, ONE A PROGRAMMING SPECIALIST. PLANS WERE BEING DRAWN UP TO HELP LESOTHO RADIO TO USE EFFECTIVELY ITS GREATLY EXPANDED AND STRENGTHENED FACILITIES AND BROADCASTING TIME. LEROTHOLI DESCRIBED SHORTWAVE BROADCASTING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CAPACITY AS "ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL" TO ENABLE LESOTHO TO "BREAK OUT OF ITS ISOLATION AND END SABC'S PRESENT VIRTUAL MONOPOLY" OF THE MEDIA AND VIRTUAL EXCLUSION OF COMPETING EDITORIAL OPINION.

5. IN COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO NOTE THE CENTRAL BBC ROLE IN PROVIDING TRANSMITTERS AND PROGRAMMING ASSISTANCE AND SAID WE FELT THESE TWO FIELDS SHOULD PROPERLY REMAIN EXCLUSIVE BBC DOMAIN. LEROTHOLI AGREED BOTH ON GROUNDS OF AVOIDING POSSIBLE DUPLICATION OR ANY APPEARANCE OF "PUSHING THE BRITISH OUT".

6. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THERE IS FULL UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCOPE OF VOA COOPERATION WHICH IS REGARDED BY THE GOL AS PROMISING A NEW SERIOUSNESS IN LESOTHO RADIO NEWS PROGRAMS. I SHOULD LIKE TO UNDERLINE THE POINT MADE LAST NOVEMBER BY LEROTHOLI (PARA 3, MASERU 1859) NAMELY THAT A STRENGTHENED RADIO LESOTHO MEANS A STRONG VOICE OPPOSED TO APARTHEID BUT ALSO STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS TO SOUTHERN AFRICAN PROBLEMS.

NORLAND

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